

Is reconciliation possible in a country that seeks homogeneity among its citizens?

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In Peru, according to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (*Comisión de la Verdad y la Reconciliación*, CVR¹), reconciliation should be a process of re-establishing and re-cementing basic bonds among Peruvians; the process should respect the country's great diversity and, therefore, be multi-ethnic, pluricultural, multilingual and multid denominational. In Peru, however, respect for differences and the value of heterogeneity appears to be a discourse reserved for the folkloric sphere and "the symbolic," or the most efficient slogan for communications campaigns promoting the "Peru" brand.

It is in within this context, which is characterized by both the need for true acknowledgement of diversity for the consolidation of democracy and the state, and denial of the value of that diversity, that I propose to respond briefly to the question posed by the title of this paper: Is reconciliation possible in a country that seeks homogeneity among its citizens? In particular, I explore the impact of new education policies on reconciliation in Peru.

On 16 December 2009, Peruvian President Alan García, author Mario Vargas Llosa, and other Peruvian officials launched plans to build a "Museum of Memory," despite the tensions that had surrounded this initiative some months earlier². The construction of collective memory and of a physical space where that memory can be expressed is clearly fundamental to strengthening the country. Those who believe the establishment of a museum of memory is crucial should also be concerned about what is happening in other areas that contribute to reconciliation and memory in the country and affect the vast majority of the population, especially the key educational reforms recommended by the CVR. Education, after all, is also a vital area for the development of collective memory.

In its final report, the CVR stated that reconciliation among Peruvians requires, among other things, the implementation of a series of policies, including those related to institutional reforms, especially educational reforms. Education was considered one of the four 'essential' reforms necessary to prevent future conflict in the country.

In particular, the CVR report highlighted the important role played by education in the production and reproduction of the political violence. Although the expansion of the scope of education responded to social demand for access to this service, a decrease in government investment in education, structural problems in the educational system, and

¹ Comisión de Entrega de la Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación. (2004). *Hatun Willakuy. Versión abreviada del Informe Final de la Comisión de la Verdad y la Reconciliación*. Lima: Comisión de la Verdad y la Reconciliación.

² The current government had initially rejected the construction of the Museum of Memory, but had to give in later due to public pressure. However, conflicting opinions regarding this issue continue to arise to this day, to the point where some social movements aiming to stop this initiative have begun to appear.

neglect of rural education, led to serious disenchantment among the growing professional sector, for whom education did not enable the expected social mobility, especially in the poorest provinces. The Shining Path's discourse therefore became a way to both reconstruct their identities, giving new meaning to a situation that seemed devoid of it, and to stand up to a system that marginalized them³.

The Shining Path established itself in key institutions within the educational system, where teachers were responsible for proselytizing Shining Path ideology to students. In rural areas, where teachers were often the only evident representatives of the state, the entry of the Shining Path, as well as the mobilization of rural populations, was relatively easy once that lone tie to the state was severed. To some degree, however, the Marxist-Leninist Shining Path rhetoric that replaced the state's discourse was more of the same: a universalist discourse, based on the nationalist vision of the 19th and early 20th centuries, was replaced by the rhetoric of class struggle. Both establish an authoritarian relationship that seeks to impose a single identity on those who are lower on the ladder and both can be seen to provoke conflicts.

In Peru, the educational arena has proven violent against its disadvantaged members. Formal education in Peru has undermined the dignity of the marginalized by attacking their cultural identity and skills, and moulding them in an image created by another, be it the state, the Shining Path, or someone else. For these reasons, the CVR's recommendations about education focus on the importance of promoting respect for human rights and socio-cultural differences, so as to build a new national vision based on fostering the development of traits such as tolerance for differences.

What is the current state of these reforms, especially those involving respect for differences and improving education for the poorest Peruvians? Recent decisions about education in the country have mainly been directed at dismantling intercultural bilingual education and neglecting public education in rural areas, although these are the schools with the largest poor populations and the lowest academic performance in the educational system.

The budget for rural and bilingual education has been decreased in recent years, especially with the closing of the Rural Education Program (*Programa de Educación en Áreas Rurales*, PEAR), which was underway when the current government took office in 2006, but which was abandoned in 2007. As a result, rural schools reflect the situation of the communities in which they are located, where much of the cost of education is often covered by local residents who lack such resources⁴.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education's training programs remain aimed at a standardized vision of the country that is not adapted to the needs of rural schools, especially multi-grade schools, where specialized methodologies and appropriate materials are needed to ensure that the students who attend can attain the same performance levels as students in regular schools.

³ Pablo Sandoval, *Educación, ciudadanía y violencia en el Perú: una lectura del informe de la CVR*. Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos and Tarea, 2004.

⁴ Patricia Ames 'La educación rural: balance del período' In Ricardo Cuenca (Ed.), *La educación en los tiempos del APRA: balance 2006 – 2009* (pp. 75 – 94). Lima: Foro Educativo, 2009.

PRONAFCAP places particular emphasis on development of four components — communication, logic and mathematics, mastery of the academic concentration, and the teacher’s school curriculum — but does so in a generic way that ignores the diversity of situations faced by rural teachers ⁵.

Intercultural bilingual education has been particularly hard hit during the current administration. The Ministry of Education’s Office of Intercultural Bilingual Education (*Dirección de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe*, DEIB) has virtually no budget or resources, and lacks both the information and the influence necessary to have an impact on the rest of the educational system and to create policies for the sector that directly target the specific problems of intercultural bilingual schools. Meanwhile, training for teachers who speak local, indigenous languages has been interrupted because of Ministerial Resolution No. 017, which requires that applicants pass a series of exams for which they are not prepared, because of either the educational system or their own shortcomings. Less than 1 percent of rural teachers passed the exam⁶. Ultimately, this undermines the right of indigenous peoples to receive an education that promotes their cultural traits and language. It should be noted, however, that in response to the Ministry of Education’s neglect, regional governments are beginning to pressure for inclusion of local and cultural identity as important issues on the educational agenda.

These brief comments highlight a real obstacle to reconciliation in Peru: the development model promoted by the current government. The “vision of the country” of the current administration assumes a series of requirements, which are obstructed by “the different.” This is clear in the famous essays written by President García.⁷

Though real rural communities do exist, there are also artificial communities that register possession of 200 thousand hectares when only 10 thousand are being used for agriculture, while the rest of it remains as unproductive property. The inhabitants of such communities live in extreme poverty, and are waiting for the State to bring them help. If these lands were given value by renting or selling them, they would start being productive with the help of large investments or advanced knowledge that the new owners bring⁸.

The highest spheres of the current administration have produced a discourse about rural and indigenous inhabitants that identifies them as guilty of underdevelopment. They are portrayed as a sector that must be pushed aside to make way for foreign investment, which is the only path to development for the country. This closes off any possibility of a vision based on the country’s existing human resources and diversity.

⁵ Ibid., p. 86.

⁶ Lucy Trapnell and Virginia Zavala ‘El abandono de la educación intercultural bilingüe en la política educativa del APRA’ In Ricardo Cuenca (Ed.), *La educación en los tiempos del APRA: balance 2006 – 2009* (pp. 75 – 94). Lima: Foro Educativo, 2009.

⁷ Alan García, ‘El síndrome del perro del hortelano’ *El Comercio*, 28 October 2007; Alan García ‘El perro del hortelano contra el pobre’ *El Comercio*, 2 March 2008; Alan García ‘A la fe de la inmensa mayoría’. *Expreso*, 28 June 2009.

⁸ Alan García, ‘El síndrome del perro del hortelano’ *El Comercio*, 28 October 2007, p. 4.

As I have briefly demonstrated, this image of rural and indigenous populations has been reflected in actions taken by the government and the Ministry of Education regarding rural and intercultural bilingual education.

Given the difficulty of including the idea of “quality without homogenization,” this technocratic concept of quality requires a vision of education that is equal for all, regardless of individual differences, much less cultural differences, among students⁹.

There is no doubt that reconciliation, in the words of Spanish historian Mario López, is an act set in stone¹⁰. It constitutes the conclusion of a conflict by publicly recognizing the mistakes and damage done from all sides, materially and symbolically repairing the social structure that stirred or was damaged. Once this is achieved, it constitutes a point of no return, as all the relevant actors categorically agree to never commit the same mistakes again. In Peru, however, reconciliation is even more difficult. Reconciliation stays limited to symbolic spaces, like the much-debated Museum of Memory. Although their existence is important, they are not by themselves sufficient; in the meantime, the fact that the majority of indigenous and rural children continue to receive poor-quality education that does not respond to their needs remains unchanged. Not only does this violate those childrens’ right to the best possible education, but it also does little to combat the structural factors that unleashed years of violence in the country.

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⁹ Ricardo Cuenca, Reflexiones sobre el sentido y la forma de hacer políticas educativas a modo de introducción? In Ricardo Cuenca (Ed.), *La educación en los tiempos del APRA: balance 2006 – 2009* (pp. 5 – 12). Lima: Foro Educativo, 2009, p. 7.

¹⁰ Mario López Procesos de reconciliación: algunas reflexiones. In G. Hoyos (Ed.), *Las víctimas frente a la búsqueda de la verdad y la reparación en Colombia* (83 – 122). Bogotá: Javeriana Pontifical University, Goethe Institute and Pensar, 2007.